



DEVELOPING PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH NETWORKS IN PUBLIC HEALTH

A New Initiative Funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The current evidence base on how best to organize, finance, and deliver public health services across U.S. communities remains thin, leaving policy-makers and public health officials with limited empirical guidance for improving their programs and policies. The purpose of this project is to use practice-based research networks (PBRNs) to (a) expand the volume and quality of research on public health systems and services, and (b) enhance the ability of state and local public health organizations to translate and apply research findings through evidence-based practice.

What is a PBRN?

Practice-based research networks have been used successfully in the medical research fields to increase the production and translation of research that identifies pathways for improving the quality of medical care and health outcomes. PBRNs allow practicing health care providers to collaborate with researchers in designing, implementing, evaluating, and diffusing solutions to real-world problems in clinical practice. Successful PBRNs identify relevant questions and link them with rigorous research methods applied within actual practice settings. The result of this collaboration is scientific information that is relevant to practice, externally valid, and readily adopted into practice.

Why Develop PBRNs for Public Health Practice?

This project will test models for developing and operating PBRNs comprised of state and local public health agencies working in collaboration with public health researchers. PBRNs have the potential to stimulate and support research in a number of important areas relevant to public health practice. PBRNs may provide ideal settings in which to test the effectiveness of alternative methods for facilitating the adoption of evidence-based programs and practices, such as those inventoried in the *Guide to Community Preventive Services*. PBRNs may also provide unique opportunities for studying the effects of administrative and policy changes, such as

- Comparative case studies designed to identify problems and/or innovations in how public health activities are currently implemented in different practice settings.
- Large-scale observational studies designed to evaluate practice variation across local and/or state public health settings in order to identify opportunities for reducing unnecessary, inefficient, or harmful variation.
- Intervention studies and community trials designed to test the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of new public health programs. Such studies may also test the effectiveness of quality improvement initiatives directed at existing programs.
- Policy evaluations and natural experiments designed to monitor the effects of key policy and administrative changes made at local and/or state levels, such as new or rescinded public health laws and regulations, shifts in program funding or staffing levels, and organizational restructuring such as service consolidation, regionalization or decentralization.

Major Objectives and Activities

The **Public Health PBRN Initiative** will accomplish the following objectives and activities over its four-year period of study:

1. Develop a feasible and replicable model for organizing and operating public health PBRNs. This model will assure that PBRNs have the institutional infrastructure necessary to design and mount rigorous studies quickly, efficiently, and accurately in public health settings.
2. Select and fund up to 15 operational public health PBRNs within the U.S. Each network will be comprised of collaborating state and local public health agencies and their community partners, working with a research institution.
3. Operate a national coordinating center that provides technical assistance and support to PBRNs in designing, funding, and conducting public health systems and services research.
4. Facilitate the design, implementation, and translation of new public health research studies through PBRNs. The national program office will assist each PBRN in developing and launching an individual research project conceived by network participants. Additionally, the office will coordinate a larger, "multi-center" research project that is national in scope and involves collaboration across multiple funded networks.

Initial Timeline of Activities

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Timeframe</u>
Select and appoint members of National Advisory Committee	January 2008
Develop and launch PBRN website and overview documents	February 2008
Disseminate documentation on public health PBRN models	February 2008
Finalize Year 1 call for brief proposals	March 2008
Deadline for submission of brief proposals	April 2008
Request full proposals from selected applicants	May 2008
Project start-up for initial cohort of 5 funded PBRNs	October 2008

For More Information: the National Coordinating Center



The National Coordinating Center for the Public Health PBRN Initiative is located at the Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health, at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock, Arkansas.

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